

August 28, 2018

Dear Mr. Michael Busby, Mr. Ross Perry, & Mr. Richard Lane,

RE: Proposed 40b subdivision at 81 Chace Hill Rd.

A little history first, before we talk about the proposal for 81 Chace Hill Rd.

Sterling is a wonderful town. We have been more than pleased to have our kids grow up in a rural community such as this with its deep roots in agriculture. We moved here 17 years ago from the City of Fitchburg where we lived for almost 7 years. In fact, we lived in Fitchburg because it was the only area we could afford as a young newly married couple on a teacher's salary. After saving and looking around at options we purchased 83 Chace Hill Rd. in Sterling for \$160,000. It was a mess! It had a cesspool, squirrels were living in the attic, and frankly, it was uninhabitable. Only due to the fact that we were not intimidated by hard work were we able to gut our house and bring it back to look as it does...rather slowly we will add. It has taken years! In the end, it is nothing fancy but we are proud of the sweat equity that we poured into it over these past years and we are proud to call it our home.

Before we purchased our home 17 years ago we looked at how the engineer had carved off 2 acres for us while preserving enough road frontage for the future use of the 18+ acres remaining. The current applicant of the proposed project at 81 Chace sold us our house and 2 acres all those years ago. Given the lot boundary configuration, we have been prepared for the time when some houses would eventually be built. However, based on the town's bylaws and building regulations, we were confident that at most we would be living next to 6-8 houses some day, not 16! We did not anticipate a high density housing project next to us; that is why we left Fitchburg! We predicated our choice to purchase 83 Chace Hill Rd. knowing the town's bylaws and regulations would give us protection from once again living within a high-density area.

It is not our land and we can not dictate what a landowner does with his/her land AS LONG AS it conforms to the bylaws and regulations of the town. In fact, if the 18+ acres in question were flat and without the wetlands and power lines, we wouldn't be writing this letter because the owner of 81 Chace Hill would be able to build 6-8 houses. BUT it is wet and it does have power lines, so it is not conducive to the by-laws of the Town of Sterling. The lot conditions are not our fault and we should not have to suffer living within and next to a high-density neighborhood because of it. This brings us to the present.

First and foremost, WE ARE NOT OPPOSED TO A 40B PROJECT IN OUR BACKYARD. Everyone needs a place to live and we want others to enjoy Sterling the way we have and do; we want others to enjoy a rural, low-density, agricultural setting. That is why we moved to Sterling and we want to preserve that quality. The idea of having affordable units for those who want to enjoy Sterling, yet do not have the skills to gut a house like we did, is welcomed by us. So, what are we opposed to? We are opposed to the scope and scale of the proposed project at 81 Chace Hill. The proposed 16 unit

subdivision at 81 Chace Hill Road does not live up to the integrity of the town of Sterling. 16 units does not fit the area nor does it fit the lot. In a nutshell, it is too dense.

[According to the handbook on 40b design reviews](#) prepared for Mass Housing (among others) by The Cecil Group, "...the acceptable density of a given housing development is site and context specific," p. 2. Therefore, it is our opinion, given the context that Sterling as a whole, and this lot in particular, is zoned as rural residential and farming, the 16 units as configured are too dense. The Cecil Handbook goes on to state, "...that conceptual project design is generally appropriate for the site on which it is located..." The owner wants to make some money off of his non-conforming lot yet his proposal is too dense for the area.

So, what's to be done?

If Mass Housing is seriously considering this project it needs to be pared back. We propose 10 units or 5 duplexes within the same area that will mean 2 affordable units (20%) and 8 market value units. This option allows Mass Housing & Sterling to add to its respective affordable housing portfolios, preserves badly needed open space, and allows us to maintain living in a low-density area. Just as important, this low density option allows the applicant to obtain a substantial value for his nonconforming lot. He will still make \$390,150 (He proposed a profit of \$624,254. Divide this by 16 units to get a profit of \$39,015 per unit) or more. Whatever the final profit, it is still better than holding onto a non-conforming lot that is slated to be sold to him for \$180,000.

We have other ideas as to location of the units within the proposed area and we are certain that we can work together on a project design that fits the needs and wishes of all parties involved because as it states on the [Mass Housing website](#), "The following values guide the culture of Mass Housing into the future: Integrity, Excellence, Collaboration, Respect, Accountability, & Service"

Given these values, we look forward to meeting with all interested parties to discuss this project so that a compromise can be met and so that others may enjoy the rural, agricultural charm that the Town of Sterling has to offer.

Peace & Thank you,
Michael and Nancy O'Connor
83 Chace Hill Rd.
Sterling, MA
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